Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
Dana P. Jacobson, Publisher/Managing Editor
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A-ONE #0125   08/20/99

~ UVK 2000 Site Open!   ~ People Are Talking!   ~ PSX 'X-Files'!
~ "You Have Mail" - NO! ~ Classic Gaming Expo!   ~ 'Atari Times' Ends
~ Dreamcast Ready 9/9!   ~ Christmas Virus To Hit ~ 'Atarian' Starts?
~ PSX 2 Ships in January ~ ExtenDOS Gold Updated! ~ Sega VMU Ready

-* PSX & N64 Drop Prices to $99 *-
-* US Colleges Failing Y2K Preparation *-
-* AltaVista Offers Free U.S. Internet Access *-

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Well, Joe and I went back to work this week (different places, different
states!). I have a feeling that Joe's backlog of work surpassed mine by a
mountain or two of stuff! I had a lot, but I have some assistants that try
to minimize my backlog (they hide it from me well! <g>). Should I tell Joe
that I have another week of at the end of the month? Nah, he'll just give
me grief! <g>

Lots of Atari-related news for you this week. Unfortunately, another source
for Atari news has gone under. However, there's the possibility that
another one will be born - so stay tuned. What few details we have
presently, are included in this week's issue.

Other than that, I'm rushed for time this week, so let's see what's in
store!

Until next time...

                         Ultimate Virus Killer
                          (Atari ST/TT/Falcon)

From: Richard Karsmakers

The "Ultimate Virus Killer 2000" is the industry standard virus killer for
the Atari ST/TT/Falcon platform. The program has been around for well over
a decade, and with the latest release (8.1) it's turned shareware.

There is now an official "UVK 2000" support site where you can download the
program, find descriptions of all Atari TOS-platform computer viruses (and
their symptoms) and more. It's located at http://uvk.atari.org.

                     Extendos Gold & CD Writer Updates

From: Jo Vandeweghe <dipching@ping.be>

Hi !

Just a little message to say that Extendos Gold has been updated and the
new version 3.2 is downloadable free of charge for registered users of
the 3.1 version.

Also a new version of CD Writer plus is available ...

The combination of both new versions allow to use TEAC RDS55 cd
recorders and more of course ...

http://www.cyberus.ca/~anodyne/

Croft Soft Software - Press Release

From: Colin Polonowski <colin@croftsoft.zetnet.co.uk>

Croft Soft
Press Release - 19 August 1999

                        Atari Times - The End...

It is with great regret that I have to announce that the Atari Times has
closed. It has been almost a year since we released our last issue and we
no longer have the time or money to continue investing in creating a top
quality magazine.

We had planned to continue with the Atari Times with an on-line magazine,
but unfortunately there is no longer enough support in both readers and
contributors to sustain such an effort.

The Atari Times Homepage will continue to be available for the forseeable
future, and every previous issue can be downloaded from this page.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone who has supported us over the past
few years - there are too many names to list here.

Long live the Atari platform...

Colin Polonowski   colin@croftsoft.zetnet.co.uk
Croft Soft   http://www.croftsoft.zetnet.co.uk/
Atari Times   http://www.croftsoft.zetnet.co.uk/atimes/
DVD Times   http://www.croftsoft.zetnet.co.uk/dvdtimes/
The Unexplained   http://www.croftsoft.zetnet.co.uk/unex/

                        NEW Atari Magazine

From: "Bob F" <info@techsoftware.freeserve.co.uk>

                    ATARIAN - NEW ATARI MAGAZINE

For some time now we've been planning to release a short-form (16-20 pages) *pri
nted* A4
magazine with disk for Atari users priced at around 2 UK pounds. The
magazine would contain a mix of news, reviews, hardware & software updates,
letters, and advertising.

With announcements indicating the imminent closure of 2 much appreciated
magazines in recent days, we decided to establish if there is still

sufficient interest in the community for a another printed magazine.

We have kindly received plenty of interest and support from prospective advertisers, so now its your turn. If you think that you would be interested in subscribing to Atarian, a regular printed magazine with disk at approx. 2 uk pounds per copy - please email me at:

Atarian@techsoftware.freeserve.co.uk

If we get enough response we will give it a go!

Kind Regards

Bob
Parkland Publishing

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->From the Other Editor's Desk
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Joe Mirando, Managing Editor
jmirando@portone.com

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                    PEOPLE ARE TALKING
                   compiled by Joe Mirando
                      jmirando@portone.com

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Has it been a week already? If you read last week's column, then you know that I wasn't really looking forward to going back to work after my two week vacation because I feared that there would be piles of work stacked up and waiting for me.

Well, let's just say that I underestimated the amount of work. I may have to take up mountain climbing just to get started on it all. It's truly amazing to me that a business as small as this one can accumulate the this backlog in only two weeks. But that's exactly what it has done, and now it's my job to make it go away. Oh well, I've done it before.

I know, I know, I'm not the only one in this position. Everyone is overworked, under-appreciated, and generally put upon these days. But THIS situation is the only one that affects ME! <smile>

Well, enough of that. Let's take a look at what's being said on the UseNet...

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

This is a bit of a departure, but the following posts pertain to
SETI@home and some of the Atari people who are participating. For those
of you who don't know, SETI@home is a project using more than a million
(yes, we broke the 1,000,000 mark last week!) personal computers all
around the world to search radio telescope data for possible signals
from an extraterrestrial intelligence. You can't do it on an Atari
unfortunately, but those of us who also have PCs or Macs can join in.

Louis Holleman posts:

"Lately I've seen reports about this SETI business, so I got interested.
Just wonder where I can get some basic info about what it is all about,
where to get the s/w and what is expected. If anyone can point me to a
URL for that, thanks in advance."

Having started the Team Atari SETI@home group, I tell Louis:

"You can find all the info that's available from the SETI@home web pages
at:

http://setiathome.ssl.berkeley.edu

At present, you can't do it on an Atari. <frown>

There are programs for PC (Windows, NT, OS/2, etc.), Mac, and various
Unix-like OSs such as Linux and BSD as well as various high-end systems
like Sun workstations.

At this moment, Team Atari is composed of 23 individuals who have
contributed a total of almost thirteen THOUSAND hours of CPU time to the
project.

If you've got a PC or a Mac (or even a MIPS or SPARCstation <g>) laying
around, you're more than welcome to join us at Team Atari!

Whether or not you join, check out the web page. It's very interesting
stuff."

        As a sidenote, someone in the alt.sci.seti NewsGroup saw my post
        about Team Atari and replied, "Okay, I pulled my old Atari 400 out of
        the closet. Now how do I load the program? lol"

        I, not being one to pass up a chance to slap someone down, replied
        "Just the same as you do under Windows98... ONLY WITHOUT THE CRASHES!
        <g>"

        Believe it or not, there hasn't been a reply.

Steve Maclagan tells me:

"I'm running Win98 and it would take 36 hours or so per unit if I ran it
as a screen saver, since I set it to run all the time it now takes 12
hours or so, this is because it doesn't need to do a lot of graphics
calculations, I'm running v1.06, but if you have an earlier version you
might find it doesn't run any faster as previous versions still did the

graphics calculations when running in the system tray. I'm running a PII 350Mhz.

I did notice when I had a look at text only version of Setiathome that the only version for the m68k is for an hp computer running netbsd1.3.3 , but when I looked at the NetBSD web site there is an Atari port of that operating system, but only for Atari TT030, Falcon and Hades computers, what I was wondering was if anyone had tried this operating system and the Setiathome client for that hp computer and whether it worked?

I reply to Steve:

"THERE IS AN ATARI PORT OF SETI@HOME UNDER ANY OS?!?!?!?!

I've just GOT to check this out! I'm just finishing my vacation now, so it might be several weeks before I get to check on the OS and such.

Yes, I did mean "just finishing" my vacation. <boo hoo hoo> I'm going to be up to my armpits in work for a while.

I will, of course, let everyone know what happens, both here and in A-ONE Magazine (notice the shameless plug?).

Okay, on to purely Atari related news. Gareth Howe posts:

"I am developing an Atari GEM desktop type shell for Windows95/98. I just want to know if anyone out there would be interested in such a program or if one already existed. Let me know your thoughts."

Raymond Lohengrin tells Gareth:

"Humm that sounds interesting. When I HAVE to USE Windows I really dislike the Win desktop as it really is a pain to use. A GEM like (Atari like) desktop with all the functions would really make things easier but I am afraid Win95/98 would be always a pain no matter what dress we put on it.

I also use the Mac and I am convinced that the Atari Desktop (and its functions) is really the best!"

Oliver Schildmann tells Gareth:

"Uh, yes YES *YES*!

Although, since I "nailed" the Explorer windows to specific positions, I can live with it (especially because I use the Atari mouse cursor and the "busy bee").

a> if one already existed.
No, it doesn't. A GEM desktop shell only exist for Windows 3.11 (from the team of GEM Artline) and is therefore limited i.e. to 8+3 filenames, it doesn't have DDE and, especially, I would miss these cute little Explorer enhancements for the right mouse key.

Anyway: A shell like Jinnee would be very nice."

Jo Even Skarstein adds:

"I agree. Desktops like Thing and Jinnee are a *lot* better than any desktop for the mainstream-platforms. But both KDE and GNOME (Linux) are catching on, and probably the best desktop I've ever seen is Directory Opus on the Amiga. I sure hope that "our" desktop-developers steal some ideas from these."

Jim Lazarenko asks:

"I know this question has come up before, but I don't recall seeing a final verdict. Just wondering if anyone had some thoughts on how (or if) game units with yellowing plastic should be cleaned, and if some of the yellowing can be removed. I am mainly thinking about some older Atari computer equipment, however I am not sure if the yellowing is due to old age, a smoke filled environment or a little bit of both. Any thoughts are welcomed."

Brian Fowler tells Jim:

"I have had success in removing yellow stains by soaking the plastic object in bleach.

I removed all the labels, and metal parts first, but it worked fairly well. If you can't isolate the part to plastic only, you can try laying a napkin soaked in bleach on the offending plastic part, making sure the bleach does not go places you don't want it to. It can take a day or more for each soaking, and I would advise against performing this in certain places, like the kitchen counter or dining room table!"

Jon Melbo adds his thoughts:

"Old age doesn't do it. There are three things that can do it. Smoke. Heat (probably not the culprit). Sunlight or ultraviolet (over time). The smoke one is easy. That's tar film. Comes off pretty easy with a solvent (such as fantastic or whatever cleaner). The other two I'm afraid there's no real good cure for other than to mil off plastic until you get past the yellowed plastic. That's really not an option."

Roger Cain adds:

"It's usually best to remove the plastic case from any electronics first - this is generally quite easy.

Then use a spray-on kitchen surface cleaner. In the UK these go by the names of "Mr.Muscle" and "Jif". Work these onto the surface using a nylon brush which will react into any fine mouldings. Rinse well in warm water and allow to dry thoroughly. The surfaces will be so clean that they will easily pick up grease marks etc. so spray with a silicone based polish and buff-up with a clean cloth to protect them."

John Gray adds this tip to the mix:

"With my 1040STe, I got sick of the yellow-ish plastic too. Last time I took it apart (to transplant a better floppy drive into it) I took the top of the case outside, masked off the power & disk drive LED windows and the Atari logo, then hit the sucker with spray paint. This was after using a tiny flat file to enlarge the cooling slat holes near the power supply. The thing runs cooler now, and looks great. It was grey primer auto paint, BTW. One could just as easily go candy-apple red if one wanted to."

Chris Worthington asks:

"My ancient 520STFM (1989 rainbow TOS) died a few years ago, and I'd really like to get it up and running again (I feel the need to play Megalomania...).

The ST was teetering on the brink for quite a while, and would randomly bring up disk errors ('No disk in drive'), and eventually it reached the stage where it would refuse to ever recognize there was a disk present in the drive. All this leads me to assume that the floppy drive is knackered, and that replacing it might get the ST up and running again. I even tried putting an old PC floppy drive in (ok, but it might have worked...)

So my question is, is it likely to be the floppy drive, and if it is, can I get hold of a replacement (direct from Sony?)?"

Nicholas Bales tells Chris:

"There are 2 common causes for the above symptoms:
- Bad PSU
- Bad Drive

In both cases, the only practical remedy is to replace the faulty component. A good source for a PSU is an old Atari, but you have the risk of getting another dead one. You can get replacement parts from most Atari dealers.

For the floppy drive, you can use a standard PC floppy drive, but you have to perform a few changes on it. These are described in the Quick FAQ. My STE is happily running a modified Mitsumi drive (which is what most OEM PC's use nowadays)

I don't think Sony drives were used inside the Atari. All of mine always had Epson drives. Anyway, any modern PC floppy drive can be used, the difference being in how easy it is to modify it."

Guillaume DØflache asks about graphics formats and Atari web browsers:

"Can any of the following read .PNG-files?
 - Wen.Suite
 - Light of Adamas
 - CAB
 - Newsie
 - Lynx (sorry, just joking)

Just to know if I can use this format on my Web page instead of GIF (for static images)... But perhaps only a few non-Atari browsers support it?"

Neil Roughley tells Guillaume:

"Implementing PNG inlines isn't a good idea right now. Not just because Atari browsers don't support the format but most browsers in general don't either. On the Mac, for instance, Netscape has limited PNG support but Explorer has none.

Externally linked PNGs, on the other hand, are OK to use even on the Atari, which has available a number of helper programs that work alongside CAB (my favorite is GrafTool).

BTW, if you're interested in making your HTML more or less CAB-friendly, especially if you don't have the browser itself, check out the URL below. It's a comparison chart using flavors of HTML 4 as a reference to CAB's support:

http://www3.bc.sympatico.ca/roughley/cab_specs.htm"

Guillaume DØflache asks:

"Can anyone tell me the difference between .APP and .PRG executable-program extensions? Just being curious..."

Ronald van der Kamp tells Guillaume:

"When things started we only had programs. Later on we became applications. Then there was mayhem. Everything is a program.

So we were told: .prg only for programs to run in the auto-folder. (put a .ttp in the auto-folder and it will not run.) In principle (GEM is not here yet) a program (.prg) in the auto folder is a ttp program: no graphic output and mouse-use (forget XBoot for the moment) only characters on a so called VT52 screen and simple keyboard input with echo.

So app becomes the extension for things a user clicks active on his desktop and that uses GEM (windows, mouse).

Now with multitasking it is nice to give parameters to an application when you start it just like you can (mostly must) do with a ttp.

So we have now GTP Gem Take Parameters applications.

And what about the extension .TOS? Anybody?

And the very seldom found .img (loadable executable code) not to be confused with the picture format .img."

Well folks, I know it's on the short side, but that's it for this time around. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - PSX & N64 Drop Prices to $99!!
   """"""""""""""""""""""""""""""   'X-Files' on PSX! Sega's VMU!
                                   CG Expo Reports! And much more!

->From the Editor's Controller - Playin' it like it is!
   """"""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Well, from everything that I've read online so far, the Classic Gaming Expo
show was a terrific success! Kudos to John, Keita, and Sean for another
great show! What an amazing collection of celebrities of the classical
gaming 'era' - all gathered together in one location. It must have been
like being in a nostalgic videogame time warp. I wish that I could have
been there!

A number of show reports were forwarded to me from various places on the
internet. I've included a few there, as well as some comments from
show-goers that appeared on the Jaguar Interactive web site. We even
included a "rebuttal", from Don Thomas, to an article appearing in one of
the online gaming magazines. Consequently, a second article appeared from
the magazine's editor! No apology, but an "explanation" to the first.

I even had a "care package" sent to me from the show, courtesy of Don
Thomas! I had asked him to pick me up a few things; and Don was gracious
enough to do that. It'll cost me a pretty penny, but it's more than worth
it! I grabbed a reprint of "Zap, Rise and Fall of Atari", the Warshaw
video, the "Stella at 20" video, the CGE program, and Hasbro's Atari Arcade
Hits CD collection. What a haul!! If it rains this weekend, I know what
I'm gonna be doing!

There should be two comprehensive CGE reports coming in the next week or so.
There was a reporter for A-ONE at the show, as well as a report coming from
Songbird Production's Carl Forhan. So, look ahead for those.

Until next time...

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News   - The Latest Gaming News!
  """"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

                  PlayStation To Land January 23

Financial firm Merrill Lynch predicts that the PlayStation 2 -- Sony
Corp.'s next-generation game machine -- will hit Japanese shelves on
Jan. 23 at a hefty price of 45,000 yen (U.S. $391), according to a report
published this week.

Even at that price, Sony will barely cover the cost of the parts needed to
build the machine, ZDNN reported in a previous article. In addition, the
machine will have to contend with Sega Enterprises Ltd.'s own game machine,
the Dreamcast, which has been available in Japan for almost a year.

While Dreamcast machine will hit U.S. shelves Sept. 9 at a much more
affordable $199, analysts have predicted that the PlayStation 2 will become
the giant in the market.

Merrill Lynch's outlook is also optimistic. The report pegs initial
shipments of the PlayStation 2 at 400,000 units with a total of 1 million
consoles sold during the first three months of 2000.

Those numbers mesh with the agreements forged between Sony and its partners. For example, Sony has contracted Toshiba to manufacture the console's main processor to the tune of 1 million processors by Dec. 1999, and another million in the first quarter of 2000.

The aggressive plans will drain the company's coffers, according to the Merrill Lynch report, which predicted that Sony's PlayStation division will post a $110 million loss in the year ending March 2000.

Those losses will be temporary if demand picks up, transforming into a $130 million profit by the following year. High software prices will contribute to the turnaround, with the 10 initial titles at an average price of 8,000 yen (U.S. $70) each.

The report said to expect more details at the Tokyo Game Show in September.

Nintendo Joins Sony In Dropping Game System Price

Nintendo Co. Ltd. joined rival Sony Corp Monday by dropping the U.S. price of its current generation game system to less than $100 as the competition among video game makers heats up ahead of Sega's release of its next generation system.

Nintendo said its Nintendo 64 system would be available for $99.95 starting next Monday, the same day that Sony plans to cut the price of its Playstation system to $99. Sega, the No. 3 maker of game consoles, plans to launch its Dreamcast system in the United States Sept 9, more than a year ahead of the launch of Nintendo's and Sony's new systems.

Nintendo, based in Kyoto, Japan, ranks No.2 behind Sony in sales of home video game system. Both companies expect to launch their next generation systems for the holiday shopping season of 2000.

Sega's Dreamcast, which was already launched in Japan, features a built-in 56K modem and the eventual ability to play games with other players over the Internet.

Two game controllers are included with the Nintendo 64 in the lowered price, the company said.

''Thanks to our financial strength and rapidly growing market share, we are very pleased to make these exclusive hardware bundles available at these low price points," Peter Main, Nintendo's executive vice president for sales and marketing, said a statement.

Sega Dreamcast Provides Portable and Enhanced
Game Play With Visual Memory Unit

Sega Dreamcast First Console to Offer Hand Held
Gaming and Internet Functionality

Sega of America will bring gamers more ways to play their favorite videogames on 9-9-99 with the launch of Sega Dreamcast, the 128-bit

superconsole with a built-in 56K modem that brings the most realistic and advanced game play ever achieved in a videogame system.

With Sega's Visual Memory Unit (VMU) -- a portable gaming device that allows for hand held gaming -- gamers can save games, play mini-games on the road, trade games with friends and even download special characters and plays for use on Sega Dreamcast from the Internet. The VMU will be sold separately for an SRP of $24.99.

Sega Dreamcast's VMU is an 128K memory card with a built-in LCD screen that plugs into the Sega Dreamcast control pad and works as both a memory device to save games and a game-enhancing peripheral. Using the LCD screen on the VMU gamers have a strategic advantage by being able to call sports plays without their opponent knowing what they are doing and view vital information, that usually appears on the Television screen, on the VMU.

''In creating Sega Dreamcast we found that gamers wanted more ways to play their games and didn't want to feel confined by any limits," said Greg Thomas, vice president of product development, Sega of America. ''With the VMU, players can enjoy not only Sega Dreamcast games away from the home, but they can expand gameplay on Sega Dreamcast, experiencing a new level of strategy and raising the level of competition."

Sega Dreamcast VMU allows games to take on a life of their own and exist away from the Sega Dreamcast unit. Following are some first and third party games that will utilize the VMU:

"Sonic Adventure" -- Watch as Sonic the Hedgehog races onto the Sega Dreamcast at unprecedented speeds! The VMU extends gameplay with a special "virtual pet" feature in which gamers can download characters (AKA "Chao") directly from the game into their VMU. From there, gamers must nurture, feed and care for them in order for them engage in head-to-head "Chao" battles and mini games.

"Sega Sports NFL 2K" -- The VMU will provide gamers with strategic options they have never had before for in sports games. Using the VMU, gamers will be able to surprise their opponent with secret attacks by allowing them to enter their plays on the VMU's LCD screen instead of on the television screen where their opponent could see what they had planned.

"Power Stone" (Capcom) - Power Stone is the first fantasy fighting game to allow full interactivity with a 3D environment. The game features eight mysterious new characters with varied fighting styles. Once gamers have completed Arcade Mode, using different characters, secret mini-games will be unlocked. These games can then be downloaded into the VMU. The mini-games include a mini-airplane shooter and a Vegas-style slot machine. As gamers play through the mini-games, they will receive gold coins. These gold coins can be used to unlock special features including an art gallery mode and a collection of music and sounds from the game.

"Ready 2 Rumble Boxing" (Midway) - Featuring Michael Buffer, The Voice of Champions, this hyper-realistic 3D boxing game gives gamers the opportunity to compete as one of 16 boxers, each with their own fighting style. Gamers can track their health meter, punches thrown and the percentage of accuracy on their VMU which will give them a competitive advantage by clearing up the gameplay screen and helping them focus on the action of the game.

"TrickStyle" (Acclaim) - "TrickStyle" features one mini-game called TrickStyle Jr. In this game, futuristic hover-boarders attempt to ride over pickups that increase the length of the colorful streak of light

trailing behind their boards in the actual game. However, the longer the streak, the harder gamers find it to traverse the area as their tail gets in the way. Gamers will then be able to upload their light streaks into the visually-stunning Dreamcast game.

The Sega Dreamcast VMU will be available at the launch of Sega Dreamcast on September 9, 1999.

The Truth Is Out There: Fox Interactive Introduces
''THE X-FILES'' On PlayStation

Title Carries Highest-Ever Video Quality for PlayStation Game

Fox Interactive Monday announced the Oct. 13 release date of ''THE X-FILES" for PlayStationfi, a realistic live-action adventure
featuring David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson as Special Agents Fox Mulder and Dana Scully.

Building on the success of ''The X-Files Game" for PC/Mac CD-ROM, ''THE X-FILES" for PlayStation utilizes ground-breaking video transfer technology and a VirtualCinema game engine to allow for the highest quality video footage ever on the game console. ''THE X-FILES," a quest for the truth spread across 4 discs, will be available at retail for $44.98.

''The mass-market appeal of PlayStation is an ideal platform for a mainstream television show like 'The X-Files,' which carries such a strong fan base," said Jon Richmond, president of Fox Interactive. ''We're pleased to incorporate new technologies which allow us to successfully immerse these gamers into solving an 'X-Files' mystery with the best video ever seen on the PlayStation."

In ''THE X-FILES," players join Mulder and Scully as Special Agent Craig Willmore in an adventurous storyline developed specifically for Fox Interactive by Chris Carter, creator of ''The X-Files" television show. ''X-Files" fans will enjoy the interaction with all their favorite characters including FBI Assistant Director Skinner, the Lone Gunmen, and the Cigarette Smoking Man as well as other recurring personalities from the television series.

The advanced artificial intelligence has been successfully enhanced for PlayStation to add authenticity to the game and heighten the mystery and suspense as characters realistically react to players' actions and interrogations. The newly optimized user interface for PlayStation is compatible with the standard digital or analog controller enabling unprecedented ease of use.

Featuring more than 30 various locations including morgues, FBI offices, motels, labs, warehouses, businesses and residences, ''THE X-FILES" allows the player to enter the world of the ''unknown."

As a special agent of the FBI, the player will sort through evidence, make critical case decisions and conduct interviews to solve the mystery at hand, while multiple storylines and plot twists keep the facts in constant doubt. Depending on the course of action, the plot thickens and characters' reactions shift to send the gamer in various directions towards the truth.

``THE X-FILES" for PlayStation was developed by HyperBole Studios, using its proprietary VirtualCinema interactive game engine, a cutting-edge software tool that allows the player to become the main character in the story.

Newest SQUARESOFT Title Chocobo Racing Ships for the PlayStation

Square Electronic Arts announced the in-store availability of Chocobo Racing, an action/racing game for the PlayStation game console.

The arcade-style game is packed with eight cartoon-like characters who race their way over eight tracks, in five game modes, picking up special abilities to help them outpace their challengers. Rated ``E" for everyone by the Entertainment Software Rating Board, Chocobo Racing is a fun game for all ages. The game is currently available at retail stores for approximately US $40.

Chocobo Racing is the first action/racing title from SQUARESOFT that features Chocobo, a familiar chicken-like bird that originated in the company's world renowned FINAL FANTASY series. Other popular FINAL FANTASY characters also make surprise appearances in the game.

``The Chocobo character has become so popular over the years in the FINAL FANTASY games that it has fueled a franchise of its own," said Jun Iwasaki, president of Square Electronic Arts. ``Chocobo Racing is a game that kids can immediately pick up and play, but its depth also presents challenges for the more advanced game player."

Chocobo Racing is an arcade-style game that offers lots of challenge through the game's various modes that include Story, Grand Prix (GP), Time Attack, Versus, and Relay Race.

Story Mode is set in an old fashioned, pop-up storybook where the story unfolds through cinematic cut scenes. Chocobo progresses through the story on a quest to find more ability enhancing ``Blue Crystals." He must compete against different characters as he moves into each new chapter and is faced with a new and more challenging race.

Players skilled enough to make it to the end of the story are rewarded with the ability to customize their own character. At the end of the Story Mode, the player is given a score of points which he can use to change the five different ``parameters" or ``stats" of his new racer. Ultimately each new racing character a player builds can be saved on a MEMORY CARD and raced in other game modes.

GP is one of the game's toughest modes because this mode isn't just about speed. Players must pay attention to magic stones, abilities and driving techniques to outdistance competitors. GP allows six racers to compete on four courses. The character with the highest score from the series of races is dubbed the ``Supreme Champion."

The three other modes offer time and team intensive racing action. They include Time Attack where players race against a clock; Versus which lets players race head-to-head against a friend or against one of the game's artificial intelligence (AI) characters; and Relay Race, which pits teams of three against three in a race to the checkered flag. Players can ratchet up the excitement with two player action in GP, Versus and Relay Race

modes.

In each game mode, players can take on the role and special characteristics of a variety of colorful characters, including: Chocobo, Mog, Golem, Goblin, Black Magician, Chubby Chocobo, White Mage or Behemoth. Every character comes with its own vehicle and abilities. For example, Chocobo speeds through each of the game's tracks on roller blades dubbed ''jet blades" which propel him through the race.

All of the game's courses are littered with magic stones giving players special powers to outpace their challengers, but watch out for wily players who can enhance their power by stealing their challengers' stones. Collect two or three stones of the same type and a character's power grows exponentially.

Players can slide into a better position by mastering the game's cornering technique called, ''drifting." Or collect a magic ''minimize" stone and shrink your rivals -- wield three of these stones and your rivals can be squished by other racers.

Chocobo Racing offers eight tracks with varying degrees of difficulty. Cid's Test Track allows players to hone their racing skills while The Black Manor Track presents players with tricky cornering challenges that send racers sliding into ponds. The most difficult track, Vulcan-o Valley, is the ultimate test for aggressive racers as they can find themselves skidding into molten lava if they're not on top of the game.

Braveheart Ships!

Fans of in-depth strategy computer games can travel back to 13th Century Scotland and engage in high-pitched tribal clan warfare in Eidos Interactive's PC CD-ROM game Braveheart, on store shelves now.

The game is inspired by the epic 1995 film which won the Academy Award for Best Picture. Like the film, which was directed by and starred Mel Gibson, the game focuses on the struggles of the Scottish rebel warrior William Wallace. The player pursues Wallace's desperate mission to unite the ancient clans of Scotland through battles with the well-armed troops of tyrannical English king Edward I.

''The Braveheart license is a perfect match for this richly detailed, story-driven, strategy-combat game," commented Mike McGarvey, COO of Eidos Interactive. ''The game quality coupled with the film's passionate following and actor/director Mel Gibson's well known Braveheart character should propel the title to classic status."

The new Braveheart CD-ROM mirrors the nationalist passion, desperately brutal battles, political deceit and suspenseful atmosphere of the film. In the game, the movie characters are faithfully modeled; the user will interact with William Wallace, Robert the Bruce, Muron, King Edward, Stephen, Hamish and others. Images, dialogue and movie scenes from the Braveheart film will also be interwoven into the game.

Sanctioned by the Clan Association of Scotland, Braveheart meticulously recreates the struggle of the disbanded clans to unify and reclaim their freedom from the expansionist English forces in 1298.

Divided and war-torn Scotland is in a state of pure anarchy where the Clans have become bitter rivals over territory and political power and the English are invading the borders. Braveheart combines 3D real-time strategy with human resource management in a fictional re-enactment of this historically tumultuous time.

The Scottish development team of Red Lemon Studios has impressively reproduced the atmosphere and day-to-day realities of this period of upheaval and hardship. Using satellite terrain mapping and fractal technology, every square mile of Scotland and Northern England is faithfully reproduced.

The game features all the clans of the era, with the option to lead one of 16 clans. Each has its own territory, population and resources. Elements such as climate, military tactics and economic infrastructure are historically accurate. As leader of a clan, the player must come to terms with all aspects of daily life in the 13th century.

Braveheart features a highly advanced proprietary 3D engine that emulates day/night phases, seasonal variations, wildlife, geographic landmarks and battlefield warfare. For those who crave action, the combat engine can recreate massive onscreen conflict as depicted in the movie. Combat situations include castle sieges, cavalry clashes and village raids. The 3D models of soldiers are skinned and boned which allows for realistic combat injuries. As battlefield commander, the player decides on the formation and tactics in the fight to carry the day.

The game is available in stores now.

Electronic Arts Ships Sled Storm for the PlayStation

Electronic Arts Tuesday announced the shipping of Sled Storm for the PlayStation, the first-ever snowmobile racing game for the console system.

Sled Storm puts the player in the middle of the power and high speed of the increasingly popular sport of extreme snowmobiling -- ``sledding". Set in real-time 3-D environments, Sled Storm features over-the-top, arcade-style sledding and SnoCross racing action on wildly different terrain that includes 14 open mountain and six circuit-styled tracks.

``We feel Sled Storm is one of the most original and unique games available for the PlayStation," says producer Jules Burt. ``We wanted to capture all the excitement and danger of sledding in an extremely compelling console game. We polished the game so that it delivers an arcade-like, yet realistic racing experience and gives the user an exhilarating sense of what it feels like to control a real snowmobile."

Sled Storm features two unique racing modes: open mountain and Super SnoCross. There are eight open mountain tracks and six circuit-styled SnoCross tracks for a total of 14. The open mountain tracks are laced with jumps, ledges, trees, hidden shortcuts, chutes and a variety of terrain that help create a sensational adventure racing game.

Sleds respond to changing terrain as they skid across ice, slog down in the mud, skim across water or blast through snowdrifts to discover a hidden shortcut that drops the gamer into first place. The man-made SnoCross tracks in Sled Storm are based on the circuit-styled courses of motocross.

A unique motocross aspect is that tracks are narrower and are designed for high contact racing and for players to perform spectacular tricks.

On both track styles, racers can knock opponents into obstacles or off the course. The combining of both the strategic and competitive aspects of racing helps dial up the ''win at all costs attitude" of this game.

Speed, style and aggression are what it takes to win at Sled Storm. Players can hit jumps and pull big air tricks for points to upgrade and customize their sleds. Over 50 tricks and combinations from motocross are featured in Sled Storm. A player can pull off anything ranging from a One Footed Can Can to the always impressive Superman. The more difficult the trick, the more points rewarded for a successful landing.

Sled Storm features a unique five-point physics model for the snowmobiles. As a result, the model allows the sled to behave and react as it would in real life. For instance, if a racer comes to rest on the side of a hill, gravity will pull the sled downhill. Players who land a jump too far forward or too far back will find themselves tossed from the sled upon impact or left barely clinging on.

Acceleration and deceleration are sudden and swift, just as on a real snowmobile. Handling characteristics also change drastically in Sled Storm when the sled traverses across the changing terrain. Turning on ice, for example, becomes much slower and more difficult. Variable weather conditions including night with different colored headlights to identify each racer, snow, fog and rain add to Sled Storm's challenge. These become available as the racer progresses through the game.

Sled Storm allows the player to choose from six different characters, each with their own racing style, skill sets and verbal taunts. Two additional characters are revealed during the game. Adding to the attitude of Sled Storm is a slammin' soundtrack featuring songs from Rob Zombie, Econoline Crush, Uberzone, E-Z Rollers and Dom & Roland.

The game extends the standard PlayStation multi-player feature by offering support for up to four players via the PlayStation multi-tap. Single and traditional two-player (via split screen) racing is available. In addition, Sled Storm supports Dual Shock analog controllers.

Sled Storm was developed by Electronic Arts Canada and is being published by Electronic Arts in North America. The game carries an ''E" (Everyone) ESRB rating and has a MSRP of US$39.95.

More information on Sled Storm for the PlayStation can be found on the EA product web site: http://www.sledstorm.com.

                    There's a New Rock Star in Town -- Um Jammer Lammy
                         Rocks the PlayStation Game Console

                    Innovative New Rock 'n' Roll Videogame from the
                          Creators of Parappa the Rapper

Sony Computer Entertainment America announced Tuesday the release of Um Jammer Lammy(TM), the highly-anticipated rock 'n' roll videogame from the makers of the groundbreaking Parappa the Rapper.

Available exclusively for the PlayStationfi game console, Um Jammer Lammy once again breaks new ground in innovative and original game design, fueling the trend of music videogames that is fast-becoming one of the hottest international pop culture movements.

Um Jammer Lammy follows Lammy, a guitar rockin' lamb in an up-and-coming all-girl band called MilkCan, through a series of adventures and mishaps as she tries to make it to their first big gig on time. Players will be entertained for hours as they help Lammy and her fellow musicians, including drummer sensation Masan and the hip feline vocalist Katy Kat, blast their way up the music charts.

''Um Jammer Lammy builds on the tremendous worldwide popularity of music videogames, a genre that was created with the release of Parappa the Rapper just two years ago," said Ami Blaire, director, product marketing, Sony Computer Entertainment America. ''As one of the most unique PlayStation titles to launch this year, Um Jammer Lammy promises to add even more fervor and excitement to the music videogame category, strengthening the convergence of music and videogames and bringing a fresh level of ingenuity and humor to the PlayStation gaming experience."

Featuring ''Simon Says" style gameplay, one-to-two players must jam with Lammy and her assorted band members and cohorts in a series of seven all-out rock 'n' roll jam sessions and bonus stages, as they try to make it to their first big, on-stage concert. Gamers can utilize wah, flange, harmonizer and other effects to create their own realistic guitar sounds, and are judged on their rhythm and style as they strum to the tunes of classic rock, heavy metal, surf punk, pop beats and more, earning ratings ranging from ''Cool" to ''Bad."

The entire original music score for Um Jammer Lammy is produced by the same multimedia music industry composer of Parappa the Rapper, Masaya Matsuura, who is the developer of the concept and design of both games. Similarly, all of the visuals and characters were designed by the pioneer in the computer graphics industry, Rodney Alan Greenblat.

New and familiar faces are featured in the Um Jammer Lammy videogame world, including: Chop Chop Master Onion, the dojo rapping master; Chief Puddle, a skirt-chasing firefighter; Cathy Piller, the baby nurse who Lammy has to help baby sit; Paul Chuck, a chainsaw maniac who runs a guitar shop; Captain Fussenpepper, a senile old pilot; Teriyaki Yoko, Lammy's arch rival; and a special guest appearance by the ever-popular Parappa himself.

        NYKO Technologies' 'DC Commander' Controller Leads Lineup
           of Accessories Created for Sega Dreamcast Platform

NYKO Technologies Inc. announced the availability of a complete family of accessories designed to complement the exciting Sega Dreamcast video game console, shipping this September.

Created with bright, family-look packaging that fits into retailers' Sega accessories displays, the NYKO Sega Dreamcast family is headlined by the DC Commander advanced replacement controller, the ThunderPak force feedback unit, and the Memory Pak for Sega Dreamcast, each addressing features most popular with today's avid gamer.

''Sega's Dreamcast game platform is expected to be one of fall's hottest

sellers and it will continue its success story well through the holiday season," said NYKO Vice President Sales and Marketing, Robert J. Rienick. ''Our family of Dreamcast accessories and controllers complements this new Sega system, enhances its playing action, and offers retailers add-on sales and profits."

Including advanced features not found in the controller currently scheduled to be shipped with new Dreamcast, the NYKO DC Commander has six control buttons, compared with four on the Sega version. In addition, the ergonomically designed NYKO controller features left and right trigger buttons, a directional button, and an analog thumb pad.

The controller is also compatible with NYKO's visual memory cards. Available for immediate delivery, NYKO's DC Commander has a manufacturer's suggested retail price of $29.99.

In addition to the DC Commander, NYKO has also included a special Memory Pak in its Sega Dreamcast line. Designed for use with all Dreamcast games compatible with the visual memory card feature, the Memory Pak for Sega Dreamcast saves and restores game's high scores, levels, special weapons and custom controller settings for later play. The Memory Pak allows up to 200 blocks of game save positions and it may be linked to other memory cards for game or data exchange.

NYKO's Dreamcast accessory line also includes universal and extender cables, an S-Video cable with stereo audio compatibility, and game switchers. In addition, NYKO is offering its Dreamcast Adaptor Cable free of all charges to those consumers who purchase or have previously purchased the RF Max 900.

             InterAct Plugs Into the Dreamcast with Awesome Launch Line-Up

InterAct Accessories, Inc., a Recoton Company, announced their product peripheral line-up for the launch of the new Sega Dreamcast. The products, which will be on shelves for the highly-anticipated 9/9/99 system release date, include the Quantum FighterPad, StarFire LightBlaster, Radius RacingPad, AstroPad, Fission Fishing Controller, Alloy ArcadeStick, TremorPak, Concept 4 Racing Wheel, as well as a complete set of cables and connectors.

''As the leading video and computer game accessory company, we're excited to be a part of Sega's introduction of the Dreamcast and are ready to support Sega and the amazing titles we've seen that will be showing off the technology," said Todd Hays, President of InterAct Accessories. ''By building a high-performance controller for essentially every type of game available on Dreamcast, InterAct is helping to ensure the level of gameplay and overall quality we know the purchaser will be demanding from the next generation of gaming."

InterAct has a full array of console peripherals to enhance the gaming experience and complement the Dreamcast's incredible list of launch titles. The Quantum FighterPad and Alloy ArcadeStick are perfect for Soul Calibur or Mortal Kombat Gold, while Radius RacingPad and Concept 4 Racing Wheel will bring you into games like Tokyo Xtreme Racer and Hydro Thunder. For House of the Dead, the StarFire LightBlaster is the peripheral to bring home the arcade, heart-pounding action.

* StarFire LightBlaster
* The Dreamcast's most intelligent light gun is ready to be unleashed. The

StarFire uses space-age design to incorporate the latest in light gun technology. Gamers get auto-fire, 8-way direction pad, Visual Memory Card/TremorPak Slot, ergonomic comfort, and the ultimate shooting fan's dream, automatic and manual reload settings. With the ability to fire 16 shots per second, the StarFire automatically reloads when firing stops or the clip is empty. A next generation light gun for next generation shooters. The StarFire LightBlaster carries an MSRP of $29.99.

Quantum FighterPad

For the tuff guys out there, InterAct has produced a solid, extremely durable, state-of-the-art FighterPad. Designed exclusively for the Dreamcast, this controller is fully programmable with an arcade style six button front layout and for the more traditional, two added buttons underneath. It features both an analog and digital pad, as well as slots for the Visual Memory Card and TremorPak. Now multi-step combos can be easily and quickly assigned to a single button and the added auto-fire and program functions make this a quantum leap in controller technology. The Quantum FighterPad carries an MSRP of $29.99.

Radius RacingPad

When the light goes green, it's time to get moving with the only handheld steering controller you will ever need. Sleek design will inspire racers as they whip around the track, gripping the ultra-comfortable rubber hand grips and zipping around hair-pins with uncanny control. The RacingPad allows for turning angles up to 60 degrees and can also be used as a regular gamepad. The Visual Memory Card and TremorPak slots will ensure complete compatibility. The Radius RacingPad carries an MSRP of $34.99.

Concept 4 Racing Wheel

Designed for serious racing enthusiasts, this wheel brings true-to-life, roaring roadway action to Dreamcast driving games. Concept 4 allows gamers to experience the thrill of hairpin turns and high speed wipeouts with its powerful vibration feedback. Metal shift levers, a rubberized wheel and realistic pedals add to the ultimate driving experience, providing an authentic driving feel. The fully-adjustable steering wheel easily changes position to accommodate any gamer's individual driving style, and the Button Relocation Function allows gamers to custom create the control pad layout of their choice. The Concept 4 Racing Wheel carries an MSRP of $59.99.

AstroPad

A controller for every season, the AstroPad by InterAct's PERFORMANCE brand of product, is guaranteed to brighten up any Dreamcaster's day. Available in four special colors -- black, green, blue, and red -- the AstroPad has both analog and digital control, traditional six button Dreamcast layout, and slots for both the Visual Memory Card and TremorPak. The AstroPad carries an MRSP of $24.99.

Fission Fishing Controller

A little something for the armchair angler, the Fission Fishing Controller uses an authentic winding reel for complete authenticity. That combined

with the analog control stick, simple four button layout, and built-in
directional sensors, give gamers a true sense of immersion. The Fission
also utilizes the powerful vibration feedback feature that will intensify
gameplay and allow players to experience all the line-tugging action. The
Fission Fishing Controller carries an MSRP of $29.99.

Alloy ArcadeStick

Perfect for all the fist-pounding titles out there, the ArcadeStick will
give gamers true arcade style feel and comfort. Utilizing a 12 button
configuration, players will be able to fully program moves and combinations
as well as throw it around without worrying about damaging the controller
thanks to its solid aluminum base! The controller also has a slot designed
for a Visual Memory Card. The Alloy ArcadeStick carries an MSRP of $59.99.

Additionally, InterAct will have a complete set of Dreamcast cable,
connectors, and special items available. These include the special
TremorPak which offers vibration feedback with an adjustable vibration
speed switch. Also, as part of the InterAct Dreamcast lineup, there
will be an RFU adapter, controller extension cable, stereo A/V cable,
S-video cable, and an AC cable.

                              =~=~=~=

->A-ONE Gaming Online   -   Online Users Growl & Purr!
  """""""""""""""""""""

                        CGE Brief Summary

By Carl Forhan

I just got back, and had a fantastic (if exhausting!) time. The Songbird
booth was very busy, particularly on Saturday, and I was able to demo/sell
a decent volume of new Lynx games -- Lexis, Ponx, and SFX. The CM2
expansion was available as a demo but not yet for sale. Ponx was the most
popular demo, and pretty much everyone who played it was impressed by the
visual attractiveness, speed, and competitive gameplay of the game.

The Jaguar demos were likewise fairly busy. People really enjoyed both
Protector and Skyhammer, and I fielded plenty of encryption questions for
the Jag as one might imagine. Jag sales were low for me, but honestly I
didn't bring much Jaguar product with me compared to my Lynx and 2600/7800
merchandise.

I didn't get to see as much of the show as I would have liked (no
speakers, for one thing), but I did get to see and play some great
systems and arcade units. The Vextrex really looks cool, I should get one.
:-)

Last but not least, it was wonderful to meet so many gamers/dealers/alumni
relative to video games, and put faces and personalities with all the
supportive Atari fans out there. Also a great chance to talk with other
companies/developers about current projects and future endeavors.

It was a great show, and I look forward to next year's event. Thanks to everyone who supported Songbird Productions at CGE by stopping by and chatting and of course purchasing product.

Sincerely,

Carl Forhan
Songbird Productions
http://songbird.atari.org

GameFan Hits The Classic Games Expo!

By: Kodomo

Ahh, the days when I would drop rolls of quarters into the Space Ace machine, or sit at home and burn countless hours in front of my ColecoVision, it was thoughts such as these that filled my mind and made me jump at the chance to attend the 1999 Classic Gaming Exposition in Las Vegas, together with ECM and Eggo.

It's not often that you have a chance to see things from the past which you once held so dear, and rarer still to be able to play them again, and even buy them!

Descending upon 'Sin City' with two of my ninja-gamer colleagues for a one-day visit to days of gaming past (along with some gambling) was the idea; but as so often does, things went awry from the get-go.

ECM was called away on a family emergency, and left explicit orders that I obtain two of the last Jaguar games (that's right, the Atari Jaguar) still in development. His random fits of ADS during a four hour drive would not be missed, but his vast knowledge of 'old school' gaming (and genuine interest in them) would be.

In the days leading up to the drive, Eggo became less than enthused (surprising. considering he has no discernable emotions to begin with) and decided not to go, preferring to focus on the current magazine deadline. Nor really much of a reason, but my suspicion is that he didn't want to be away from Monster Rancher 2 for more than a day.

Reduced to but one lone adventurer, I set out for the bright lights of Vegas both curious and apprehensive, but mostly with the desire to leave with more money than I arrived with!

Taking place at the Plaza Hotel, the 1999 Classic Gaming Exposition looked pretty bad from the start. Perhaps it was the cheesy house casino, or the insane desert heat that put me into an irritable state, but I think I'm leaning more towards the fact that I dropped 200 bills in the casino on Sunday morning. As I walked upstairs, cursing my gambling ineptitude, I was greeted by a sight that only Jimmy Dean himself could love... wall to wall 'Sausages'; they were everywhere! Not a single person looked like ANY GameFan staff member (and we're self-proclaimed sausages, ourselves); instead, it was like walking into a room full of the evil spawn of some D&D freak and the "women who watch them play". Gamers in their 30's (who age worse then mayonnaise in the sun) dressed just as they did in the 1980's, brimming with childish glee to be in the presence of such classics. Scary

at best, shocking and somewhat disturbing at worst.

As I walked around the Expo, I found myself comparing it to E3. Unfair, I know; but that was my only frame of reference. The most telling thing that I can say is that the CGE in its entirety would be dwarfed by the Sony booth at any given E3. Twelve tables consisting of "Old School" games and the companies selling them, all squashed into a room no bigger than the GameFan offices. Even with my free media pass, I began to feel as if I'd been charged too much, since the sheer time of driving to Vegas (nine hours round trip) far outweighed the time I spent in the Expo (just under an hour). (Ed's Note: The two bills he dropped in the casino might also have something to do with feeling overcharged!)

The games were split into Arcade cabinets (such as Dig Dug, Tempest, Moon Patrol, Frenzy, etc...) and consoles (Intellivision, Atari, Colecovision, and so forth). Each one had games available to be played, and it was easy to recognize the old masters knocking off the rust. There in the corner, an old-school gamer stood at the Tempest machine, while others could only watch in awe, delighting at the brutal display of skills. It was at that moment that I began to realize the tremendous change that has taken place in our industry over the past decade. Games have come a long way since the early 80's, and so have I!

Lost in a myriad of 'Beat 'em Ups' and 'Racers', today's arcades are designed to take in the maximum amount of money in the shortest span of time. Skill and mastery are rarely achieved (and serve only to allow 'smack talking'), never reaching the heights of these 'golden days'. Don't get me wrong, today's games are light years ahead of the games on display at the CGE, but the game play of these classics has stood the test of time. Back then, it wasn't uncommon to watch someone play on a single quarter for hours on end. Unfortunately, this rarely (if ever) happens in today's games. With a flood of two-player titles (which bring in a lot more money), there's just no time to develop skill against the computer.

Driving home from Las Vegas, I began to feel much older than I thought I was on the drive there; but strangely, I felt nostalgic for the games that once were. The joy of taking one dollar to the arcade and coming home many hours later is lost on most young gamers, and that's one of the saddest things of all.

From: Donald A. Thomas Jr. <datj@yahoo.com>
Subject: Feedback
Date: Tuesday, August 17, 1999 8:50 PM

RE: http://www.gamefan.com/hotinfo.asp?s=2190&rs=

Dear GameFan,

I found the Monday, August 16 article by Kodomo entertaining. (S)he admits to have invested a great deal of time to travel to Las Vegas and to have found ample opportunity to gamble away a couple of large bills. Yet, there was no mention of the back-to-back CG Expo keynotes or panel discussions that took place in an adjacent room. Nor were there any remarks regarding the other numerous debuts and presentations that took place over a three day period (including an celebrity dinner on that first Friday evening.)

I agree that the crowd size was modest many times in the expo area.

And, yes, the subject matter was focused differently than the targeted
agenda of GameFan Magazine. I'd probably feel the same way if I went to
cover a Country and Western event on behalf of a huge Los Angeles area
Hard Rock publication. Having established the fact that CG Expo appeals
to a flavor of the video game industry, I am not sure how
professionalism prevails when you choose to insult those who enjoy a
different taste of videogaming... a flavor, by the way, that spawned
the industry's existence.

Kodomo certainly has no obligation to respect the man who invented Pong
or care about the philanthropist who rebuilds coin-ops to benefit
GoodWill. He doesn't have to care about the new video game releases for
antiquated systems or the world premiere of remakes for new systems. He
certainly does not have to cover a story about a couple
just-out-college enthusiasts who made sizable personal investments to
create an event to benefit their friends and heroes.

GameFan is a fine publication and I respect the fact that you know your
market and understand your audience. Although GameFan often covers
stories of no interest to me whatsoever, I have no desire to insult
you, your staff or your right to enjoy your choices of entertainment.

Respectfully,

   -- Donald A. Thomas, Jr., Curator
      ex-Atari employee
      curator@icwhen.com
      http://www.icwhen.com

                  Kodomo Takes Beating From Classic Gamers

Against our better judgement, we ran an article on the Classic Gaming
Expo yesterday that was not well received by the classic games community.
This was not necessarily a surprise, however it has served as something
of a litmus test for us to understand just how fervent the fans of
classic gaming are about the history of this business. Our writer, Kodomo,
attended the show knowing full well what classic gaming is all about. He
did, in fact, play extensively on the Atari 2600 and most other classic
game systems and arcade games as a youth... just as most of we
twenty-somethings have.

However, while the charm of these classics is not lost on us, the gist of
the article was for one writer to explain just exactly how far the industry
has come since those golden years, and how he has changed as a game player
through those same years. While thousands upon thousands of game
enthusiasts remember the oldies fondly and play them often, they are a very
rare breed, indeed... and the relatively low attendance of the CGE [gave]
struck us as an indicator that perhaps the industry at large is not as
enamored with classic gaming as some would have you believe.

That said, it's fair to note that Kodomo took a few shots at the attendees
that he shouldn't have. We have sacked him repeatedly for these comments,
because the great majority of the mid-to-late twenties staff of GameFan
were spawned from the very same gaming pool as the CGE attendees.

I should also mention that, after posting that news story (and before
receiving any E-Mail), Kodomo was heard to say "I might have been too

hard on the thing."

I should also mention he's been trying to quit smoking in recent weeks, his dog died, and he rolled his car on the trip home. He lost his wallet in Vegas to someone who claimed to be Elvis, and had to come up with gas money by stripping at The Cheetah. He had a hard weekend...

Anyway, we posted the story because everyone is entitled to their opinion. The story won't be coming down, because Kodomo is still entitled to his opinion. He discovered something about himself after that expo, and what he found is that the innovation and forward movement of the video game industry is what he loves. While he has not forgotten his roots in classic gaming, he doesn't feel the same need to return to them that many of you do.

To be perfectly honest, I didn't volunteer to take the trip because every time I play one of the classics that I've got fond memories of, I find myself comparing them to recent favorites... and the classics usually don't hold up. I appreciate them for the foundation they helped build, but that's about the size of it.

Just thought I'd offer that little piece of editorial as food for thought... and for anyone who is wondering, the same "freedom to express an opinion" applies evenly to modern games such as Final Fantasy VIII...

News from the Classic Gaming Expo

This weekend IGNpocket attended the CGE'99 in Vegas. Check out some of the dirt we unearthed.

August 16, 1999

I'm beat. I just spent two days in Sin City hobnobbing with some of the industry's greats: David Crane, designer of Pitfall; Rob Fulop, programmer of Night Driver and Missile Command (2600) as well as the designer of Night Trap (yeah, yeah!); and Ralph Baer,the true inventor of videogames with the original Odyssey. Not only that, but I hung out with some truly great people who are still in the industry working on games for all systems; including the Game Boy Color.

Nyko, the peripheral manufacturer, was there peddling its product. The company had two totally awesome items for the Game Boy Color -- The Worm Light (which I have just reviewed) and the Shock 'n Rock (a do-almost-everything battery pack, speaker, and rumble pack all in one). Nyko's got some great plans for the Game Boy Color.

Hasbro had a prominent display on the show floor where the company put three upcoming PlayStation games on display: Pong, Missile Command, and Q*Bert, all of which looked fabulous (be sure to check IGNPSX for a preview of Pong coming soon). I talked with two representatives at Hasbro, and the company is actively pursuing moving its Atari line of games onto the Game Boy Color. Hasbro is currently tangled up in a contract with Majesco Sales, which is the reason why the company's upcoming Nascar Challenge for the Game Boy Color will be published by Majesco. Once Hasbro's contract runs out with Majesco, the company will head full-on into Game Boy Color development. Personally, I'd love to see tons of classic

Atari 2600 games on the system: Adventure, Haunted House, Yars' Revenge!

Speaking of Yars' Revenge, Telegames is publishing a Game Boy Color version of the game. The company had full boxed copies on sale on the CGE show floor for a budget-priced $19.95. The game will hit store shelves in full quantities this September for the same price. Yars' Revenge is a Game Boy and Game Boy Color compatible game programmed by Mike Mika at Digital Eclipse, based on the original Atari 2600 game designed by Howard Scott Warshaw in 1982. The game has been slightly modified to take advantage of the handheld system; and Mike introduced elements into the game that Howard intended on putting into the 2600 version of the game. We'll have a preview of the game shortly.

The Lynx isn't dead -- Carl Forhan of Songbird Productions had his Lynx software on display, Ponx and Lexus, two titles which I will be reviewing in the next few weeks. Telegames also had a load of new Lynx games to sell, including Fat Bobby, Raiden and Bubble Trouble.

David Warhol, president of Realtime Associates, was at the show floor representing the Intellivision scene. He was a member of the original Mattel Electronics game design team back in the early '80s, and I just had to pull him aside and ask what he's up to. Realtime Associates has developed Rugrats titles for THQ and a Barbie title for Mattel, and is continuing its development on other Game Boy Color titles as well. When we asked him about the possibility of Intellivision titles showing up on the handheld, he was very enthusiastic. "We'd love to do it." The problem, as he put it, is trying to convert the code from the Intellivision ROMs to the Game Boy system, since emulating an Intellivision on the Game Boy Color system wouldn't be possible. It may be too difficult and too long a process for it to be worth the effort. Personally, I would love to see portable versions of Intellivision games. Why don't you tell me what you think about it.

I also met up with Justin Lloyd, programmer of the upcoming Battletanx on the Game Boy Color for 3DO, and a hell of a nice guy. He's been working on a side project: converting Activision 2600 games in their original form to the Game Boy Color, among them are Pitfall, Pitfall 2, and H.E.R.O. Currently Activision hasn't shown an interest in bringing these to market, but I'm hopeful the company will see the light. Portable Pitfall II? Damn right. Just make sure you stick in the second level found in the Atari 8-bit version, Justin!

Finally, John Harris, who has been working with Digital Eclipse in converting a few Midway arcade games for the team's classic packs, has just started work on a bullfighting game for Sierra on the Game Boy Color. He was originally responsible for Jawbreaker on the 2600 as well as Frogger for Atari 8-bit computers, and he's back in the industry with a new company: Pulsar Interactive. He hopes to do more Game Boy Color games in the future.

I'll be posting full interviews with these folk very shortly, and I assure you they're going to be some seriously interesting reading material.

Oh, and I stayed up until 4 AM on Saturday playing Blackjack, but that's a whole 'nother story.

                        -- Craig Harris
                    Head Honcho, IGNpocket

More CGE thoughts...

Posted by Carl

Miscellanious tidbits:

* Had a booth next to Howard Scott Warshaw, and yes, I did have him sign my
shrinkwrapped Yar's Revenge.
* I was amazed at just how many international fans were present -- UK,
Holland, Austria, France, Germany, etc. Your support is nothing short of
incredible.
* A couple of younger guys came up to me and said they were working on a
Jaguar emulator (sorry, can't remember the names).
* Skyhammer looks cool on a hi-res monitor :-)
* Vectrex looks cool as well, wish I owned one.
* I should have brought more Lynxes to sell.
* Got to meet Don Thomas and get his autograph.
* Got to meet a former Epyx employee who works with the guy who coded Lynx
Warbirds.
* Got to meet Vince Valenti of Towers II fame (great guy and very friendly,
BTW).
* Made lots of good general business contacts for future game development.
* Old-timer pinball machines can be VERY noisy when located only 20 feet
away!
* Keita, John, Sean, and Tom were all friendly and very helpful. Nice
meeting you guys finally.
* Big, heavy boxes don't easily fit in a Cutlass Supreme for the trip home
(from the airport).

And my final parting thought:

* You can never have too many free-play arcade units in one expo. :-) Wish
I only had had more time to play them...

Great show, guys! I hope Songbird Productions can participate again next
year, hopefully with plenty of new Lynx and Jaguar products by then.

Carl Forhan
Songbird Productions

                    Re: More CGE thoughts...

Posted by Keita
In Reply to: More CGE thoughts... posted by Carl

Carl,

Thanks for the kind words, and for your support and participation
in CGE'99. Your presence was definitely one of the bright spots
(among brights spots), and it sent a clear message that Jaguar
and Lynx is alive and well. Not to mention you've gotten some
favorable coverage from the online press (and soon print press,
I'm sure!)

Anyways, if you or anyone else (who attended) have any comments,
questions or suggestions about CGE'99 or about next year's event,
by all means please drop us a line at info@cgexpo.com

It's time now for me to kick back, take a deep breath, and
finally enjoy the JagFest '99 video that I got from Carl :)

Keita Iida

VM Labs
Classic Gaming Expo
Atari Gaming Headquarters

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                      A-ONE's Headline News
                 The Latest in Computer Technology News
                     Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

              AltaVista Offers Free Dial-Up Internet Access

In a challenge to established Internet access providers, AltaVista Co., the
Web search and media network, Thursday said it had begun offering free
Internet access to U.S. subscribers willing to patronize its advertisers
instead of paying a monthly subscription fee.

The move into the Internet access business by AltaVista (www.altavista.com),
the Web's 10th-most visited destination, is part of its bid to fortify its
existing customer base and attract new users by offering direct dial-up Web
links.

But analysts cautioned that AltaVista's entry into the access business --
while a new challenge to access providers like America Online Inc. who rely
on monthly access fees -- would have only niche appeal and was unlikely to
create a sea change in the way U.S. customers pay for Internet access.

AltaVista is a unit of Compaq Computer Corp. that is in the process of
being sold to Internet venture fund CMGI Inc. Compaq stock closed down
3/16 at 22-3/4 on the New York Stock Exchange, while CMGI gained 1-3/8 to
76-15/16 on Nasdaq.

The move is part of a comeback strategy for AltaVista, for years a popular
Web search engine that was bypassed by rivals like AOL, Yahoo! Inc. and
Lycos Inc. as they expanded to offer a wider range of services.

''This is part of the new AltaVista," Chief Executive Rod Schrock said in
a telephone interview. ''The real strategy is to create a totally free
service to create more traffic and more interest in AltaVista."

But some analysts had their doubts over how widespread the appeal of the
''free," ad-supported service might be.

''This is a 'Hail Mary' pass," said John Robb, an analyst with Internet
market research firm Gomez Advisors in Concord, Mass, using an American
football term for an all-or-nothing bet.

''They are caught between two freight trains," he continued. ''On one side is AOL, with their Instant Messenger and great community builder (services). On the other side are high-(speed) cable companies, who can offer superior service."

Analysts see Web networks like AltaVista potentially being left behind if they cannot offer customers direct Web access to compete in the emerging era of constantly connected, high-speed Internet links that have no room for second-place finishers.

AltaVista's service seeks to differentiate itself by allowing users to navigate the Web through a small window that can remain open on a desktop while the user continues other activities on a computer. The so-called ''MicroPortal" will display customizable information such as business news or weather updates.

Perhaps inevitably, the ''free" service has its price.

The free access user needs to continuously interact with a "health bar" at the top of the screen, which will drop the Internet link unless the user visits the site's sponsors. Ads are custom-targeted based on the user's Web surfing habits.

But Joe Laszlo, an analyst with Jupiter Communications, downplayed possible privacy concerns, saying that, ''Many people are going to do a mental calculation and say, 'Hey, protection of my privacy and Web patterns are worth $20 per month."

Schrock said he expects to sign up 1 million users to the free access service in the first year, and 1 million to the MicroPortal service, which can be used regardless of whether a customer selects the free access service.

''We see from this a 10 to 20 percent boost in revenue in the next year," he said. ''This is not a Hail Mary pass situation by any stretch of the imagination. You don't have to be No. 1 to be successful on the Web."

AltaVista counts 35 million monthly visitors worldwide.

Analysts believe Microsoft Corp. also is mulling a more aggressive stance on access pricing through its flagging MSN Internet service in the form of low-price, or even free, Web access -- taking aim at arch-rival's pay-as-you-go AOL.

AltaVista, which is now a 100 percent-owned unit of Compaq, agreed in late June to transfer 83 percent ownership to CMGI. Compaq, the world's No. 1 personal computer maker, plans to continue to bundle the AltaVista service onto its computers in spite the transfer of ownership to CMGI.

U.S. Court Denies AOL Trademark On 'You Have Mail'

AT&T Corp. said it won the go-ahead Friday from a U.S. court to use slogans and service names popularized by rival Internet services provider America Online Inc., in the latest setback to AOL's efforts to fend off competition in its consumer businesses.

Dulles, Va.-based America Online had filed suit against telecommunications

giant AT&T last December seeking to block AT&T's WorldNet Internet access service from use of expressions like ''you have mail," ''IM," and ''buddy list" -- terms that echo popular names of key AOL e-mail and communications features.

Microsoft Takes on AOL's Messaging

Microsoft is aligning itself with threerival providers in a bid to loosen America Online Inc.'s grip on the fast-growing online instant messaging market.

Microsoft was expected to announce today that Prodigy, Tribal Voice and PeopleLink have agreed to give their users the ability to instantly exchange notes with the 1.3 million users of the Microsoft Network's instant message service.

The move increases the pressure on AOL, which is refusing to allow MSN's subscribers to communicate by instant messaging with the 43 million users of AOL's service.

Instant messaging offers Internet users the ability to exchange notes that immediately pop up on the recipient's computer screen.

In the past month, AOL has repeatedly counterattacked Microsoft's attempt to link its product with AOL's service. AOL, for its part, has allied with three other Internet service providers to enable their users easy access to AOL's Instant Messenger service.

Microsoft Says Will Publish Instant-Messaging Code

Microsoft Corp. turned up the heat Wednesday in its instant-messaging battle with America Online Inc., pledging to release software code this month in a step toward establishing a widely accepted Internet standard.

Microsoft's decision to publish its MSN Messenger protocol was welcomed by a leader of the independent committee that has been working for two years to agree on a universal standard for the hugely popular way to communicate over the Internet.

''It certainly is good news from the perspective of the work we have to do in our working group," said Vijay Saraswat, co-chairman of the Internet Engineering Task Force's instant-messaging working group.

''It helps inform our process of coming up with an Internet-wide interoperable protocol, just as it would help us for all other vendors to publish protocols," he said.

America Online is by far the dominant player in instant messaging, with more than 80 million users of its two systems, compared with about 5 million for No. 2. Tribal Voice Inc. and 1.3 million for MSN Messenger, launched last month.

AOL officials were not immediately available for comment but recently have said they intend to work with the task force on creating a universal

standard for the feature, which allows users to ``chat" on line in
real-time using instantaneously delivered text messages.

But for now the online giant has been aggressive in blocking users of MSN
Messenger and other rival systems from communicating with users of its AIM
messaging system, calling that an unauthorized incursion into its server
network.

Saraswat said he had a brief conversation with an AOL executive this week
but was unaware of any plans by the company to follow Microsoft's lead and
document its messaging protocol.

Publishing the software protocol allows other companies to create
interoperable software and is the first step toward a universal standard.

Sony Developing Plastic Hard Drive Disks

Sony Corp. said Thursday it is developing the world's first plastic disks
for computer hard drives with chemicals firm Nippon Zeon Co. Ltd.

Business daily Nihon Keizai Shimbun reported that the cost of making
plastic disks with a storage capacity of five gigabytes would be 30 to 40
percent lower than for conventional aluminum disks.

A Sony spokesman said the production cost is likely to be lower because
plastic disks do not need the same polishing process, but he would not say
how much cheaper.

The spokesman did not say when Sony will begin commercial production.

News of the development of the disks helped boost the share prices of both
Sony and Nippon Zeon on the Tokyo stock market.

Nippon Zeon was bid-only, meaning there was a shortage of sellers, at 1,033
yen from early morning, up from Wednesday's close of 933. Sony was up 310
yen or 2.19 percent at 14,440 as of 0534 GMT.

Analysts were lukewark about the news, however, saying Sony has not
completed development of the disk and evaluation of the technology is
difficult at this stage.

``Sony has been promoting various types of hard disks with several
partners, and it won't start investments until it becomes clear which
technology is the best," said Masashi Kubota, an analyst at ING Barings.

Sony is in talks with Castlewood Systems Inc of the United States, among
others, on commercialization of hard disk drives using plastic-based disks.

Sony has also separately allied with Quantumn Corp, the world's number two
maker of computer disk drives, and Western Digital Corp to develop glass
and aluminum-based disks.

($1-115 yen)

Y2K Bug Might Not Affect Internet

The Internet's decentralized structure makes it difficult to know precisely how the millions of computers connected to it will fare because of the Year 2000 technology problem, some of the Internet's top computer experts say.

But that architecture - a collection of interconnected but mostly independent computer networks - also means data traffic will be able to bypass any local Y2K failures, such as those caused by power outages.

''We're not likely to see major global outages at all," said Vint Cerf, an MCI WorldCom Inc. executive who co-invented the common ''TCP/IP" language of the Internet.

''The whole point of the Internet was to be designed in a very distributed way, so it would be reliable as a whole even if small bits of it were to go down," agreed Esther Dyson, interim chairwoman of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, the group assuming management of much of the Net from the federal government.

White House officials met today with experts, including a trade group for Internet providers, to discuss the impact of Y2K on consumers using the Internet.

''The basic core of the Internet appears likely - extremely likely - to function without problems," said John Koskinen, chairman of the President's Council on Year 2000 Conversion. But because of the loose structure, he added, ''no one can guarantee there won't be some glitches and some problems anywhere."

Cerf, MCI's senior vice president for Internet architecture and technology, predicted ''a series of little annoying problems that will bug us for most of January."

The Internet and its kindred technologies rely on computers and software owned by people and companies worldwide mostly without any supervision. That makes it difficult to predict how the vast computer network will operate in January, when it is feared that some computers won't be able to correctly identify the new year 2000.

''The Internet is about a million autonomous networks and about 50 million autonomous computers," said Tony Rutkowski, an early Internet pioneer. ''The question becomes which of those many millions of networks and computers will have problems."

Part of the problem has been gathering information about the Internet's preparations: Unlike some industries, there is no single organization in charge and little regulatory oversight by governments.

Don Heath, president of the Virginia-based Internet Society, said the Internet won't have serious problems systemwide.

''It's just not going to happen," Heath said. ''The whole Y2K thing is an absolute yawn. I am so unconcerned about it that it's hard to build a fire under me at all."

But some of the Internet's biggest companies are issuing dire-sounding warnings to shareholders. Network Solutions Inc. (Nasdaq:NSOL - news), which controls two of the 13 central computers that coordinate the world's Web addresses, cautioned against ''a failure of or interruption to normal

business" if it doesn't prepare adequately.

The other 11 computers, called ''root servers," are largely run by volunteers at universities and other organizations worldwide.

''We have no responsibility for, nor control over, other Internet domain name server operators that are critical to the efficient operation of the Internet," the company said in a recent filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission. ''We do not know whether such domain name server operators have hardware, software or firmware that is Year 2000 compliant."

''The root servers are Y2K-ready, according to their operators," said Barbara Dooley, president of the Commercial Internet Exchange Association. ''They are cooperating and have been for some time."

America Online, the world's largest Internet provider with more than 18 million customers, also said in a recent SEC filing that Y2K problems ''could result in interruptions in the work of its employees, the inability of members and customers to access the company's online services and Web sites or errors and defects in the Netscape products."

AOL said it already spent $7 million on repair efforts through March and expects to spend a total of $20 million. Spokesman Rich D'Amato said the company's Y2K testing is on schedule, ''and to date we have experienced very few problems."

U.S. Gives Academia Poor Y2K Grades

The Department of Education is giving U.S. colleges and universities poor grades on preparations for the Year 2000 computer challenge.

Only 30 percent of schools of higher learning surveyed said they had completed preparations of their most crucial computer systems, notably those that handle financial aid, Education Secretary Richard Reilly said in a letter to college and university presidents and chancellors.

Another 40 percent of respondents did not expect to have their ''mission-critical" systems fully ready to deal with the Y2K glitch until October or later, he said in the letter sent last week and released Wednesday.

''Thus, it appears that many post-secondary institutions will have little time left to adjust if schedules slip or problems are discovered," Reilly said. ''I am also disappointed that the survey's response rate was only 32 percent."

So far, only 22 of the more than 5,800 U.S. institutions participating in the student aid programs have tested their systems successfully, he said.

The Education Department's systems have been fully tested internally and validated for Y2K compliance. But for the student aid system to work, they must be able to exchange financial aid data with federal systems after Jan. 1.

Reilly warned the school leaders of possible ''significant delays in student aid delivery" if systems fail to be able to swap data in the new

century.

He called for the presidents' and chancellors' ''personal involvement" to
prepare for the glitch, which could cause computers to misread the year
2000 and potentially spark wide-ranging systems failures.

Last week, John Koskinen, chairman of the President's Council on Year 2000
conversion, said elementary and secondary schools were also lagging badly
in making software changes to dodge Y2K pitfalls.

Y2K-related failures in schools were unlikely to have a direct impact on
teaching and learning, the president's council reported in its third
quarterly report Thursday.

But they could affect school buildings, making them less safe, and disrupt
lessons that rely on computers as well as scramble student records and
payrolls, the council said.

According to spring/summer Education Department survey data, only 28
percent of more than 3,500 school districts and other education agencies
had reported all their crucial systems ready for the year 2000.

Code Cracker Worries Cryptographers

A developer of one of the most widespread computer encryption systems said
he has designed a computer that could crack open a file encoded using the
most common form of data encryption in only a few days.

If built - at an estimated cost of about $2 million - such a computer could
jeopardize the privacy of the bulk of electronic commerce as practiced
today, according to cryptographers at the conference where the design was
shown.

Most highly sensitive military, banking and other data are protected by
stronger encryption keys beyond its reach. The commonly used weaker keys,
though, would become ''easy to break for large organizations," said
cryptographer Adi Shamir of the Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovot,
Israel.

He developed both the new computer design and helped invent the widespread
coding system - known as RSA public-key encryption - that it attacks.

Shamir spoke at the opening of a two-day conference of more than 120
cryptography experts from around the world at Worcester Polytechnic
Institute.

Computer scientists said his work underscores the growing vulnerability of
the most commonly used short form of RSA keys, which consists of just 512
bits. The key - a sequence of 1s and 0s, or bits - unlocks the secret
coding of a computer transmission so it can be deciphered.

Shamir dubs his idea for the computer Twinkle, which stands for The
Weizmann Institute Key Locating Engine and also refers to the twinkle of
its light emitting diodes. The 6-by-6-inch optical computer would measure
the light from diodes to perform mathematical calculations solving 512-bit
RSA encryption keys faster than ever - within two or three days. An effort
in February to solve shorter, easier 465-bit keys took hundreds of

computers and several months.

Shamir first informally showed a prototype of his device at a conference in Prague, the Czech Republic, in May. He publicly outlined its workings at length for the first time Thursday.

''Twinkle is a little out there, but it looks like it's buildable to me," said Seth Goldstein, an expert in computer architecture at Pittsburgh's Carnegie Mellon University.

Organized crime, friendly and unfriendly governments, research institutions and others might take an interest in such a project, conference participants suggested.

In any event, users of 512-bit keys ''should be worried," said Christof Paar, a computer engineer at Worcester Polytechnic Institute.

''In the current state of the art, it is not secure," added Bob Silverman, a research scientist at Bedford, Mass.-based RSA Laboratories, a division of RSA Data Security, which Shamir co-founded but where he no longer works.

Longer keys, such as 1,024-bit, are already employed for many sensitive communications. But, out of intelligence and other concerns, the U.S. government requires special permission to export software with the longer keys. The most popular browsers are normally set to just 512 bits.

Brian Snow, a technical director for information security at the National Security Agency, spoke to the conference Thursday about weak quality assurance in commercial security products, but declined to answer press questions.

Longer keys are harder to set up and take more computer power to operate. Such power may be scarce in the wireless telephones, home appliances and other computerized conveniences of the future, cryptographers said.

Computer Virus Set To Hit Dec. 25 Is Found

A potentially highly destructive computer virus set to hit Christmas Day has been found, but so far it has not spread widely, virus experts said.

Closely held Central Command and Kaspersky Lab said the virus, which carries the same destructive payload as the Chernobyl virus, could infect PCs running Microsoft Corp.'s Windows 95, 98 and NT operating systems.

Named Win32.Kriz.3862, the Grinch-like virus could cause a significant loss of data from a PC's hard disk drive and might make it impossible to start up or re-boot the computer, said Network Associates Inc., one of the largest makers of anti-virus software.

The virus' payload would attempt to erase a computer's CMOS memory information, including date and time functions. It would try to erase data on the hard drive and would undermine the PC's BIOS, or basic input output system, the basic software that lets a computer boot up.

Medina, Ohio-based Central Command said it has updated its AntiViral Toolkit Pro anti-virus software products to detect and remove the virus. Santa Clara, Calif.-based Network Associates said it, too, has updated its

software to protect against the virus.

Network Associates has assigned a ''medium risk" assessment on the Win32.Kriz.3862 virus, because of its ''destructive payload but low prevalence in the wild."

The Chernobyl virus damaged hundreds of thousands of computers in Asia when it struck earlier this year. That was far more dangerous than the Melissa virus, which automatically prompted e-mail software to mail copies of the virus to people in the user's address book.

It had the effect of clogging up e-mail computer servers across the United States.

Web Sites' Price That Can't Be Beat

Adam Prentice, a Web entrepreneur working out of his home in Ottawa, Canada, has hit on the perfect price for the 1,000 products listed on his Internet site: Nothing.

Called Totallyfreestuff.com, his Web destination links visitors to give-aways on hundreds of other sites, ranging from beef jerky to bath soap to pantyhose. Yet despite a lack of pricetags, he says his business is expected to take in $70,000 in U.S. dollars this year, thanks to advertising sales.

''It's doing alright," said Prentice, 25, who quit his technical support job for Compaq Computer Corp. last year to focus full-time on his Web venture.

Prentice has good company: Giving away stuff on the Internet is big business. Spurred by intense competition for Web surfers, the occasional come-on of a few years ago has exploded into an essential commercial strategy - key to drawing visitors to Internet sites, stoking interest in for-fee products and getting online businesses off the ground.

''It's a great time to be a consumer," said Carl Steidtmann, chief economist at the PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP consulting firm. ''The price of everything is coming down."

Never mind just software and e-mail services. Like winners of a giant shopping spree, consumers can find items in Web categories stretching from technology to entertainment. Though figures on total Internet freebies were not available, a recent search looking for ''free" and ''give-away" on AltaVista, itself a free search service, reveals 1,142,840 Web pages with both words.

The catch is that some free sites require bargain hunters to look at advertisements, give up personal information to marketers, or buy related products.

But the offerings are clearly alluring.

There are music downloads, pornography and videos. There are desktop themes to jazz up any computer screen, animated greeting cards and a missing-person people finder. There are even free jokes.

Freemania.net, one of dozens of Web sites that lists only free stuff, includes a product called FreeDrive, which gives on-the-go computer users storage space on the Internet, easier than transporting files in floppy disks.

Hungry? Troll around a Web site devoted to giveaways, and find herbal tea, chocolate, and even gourmet chocolate chip-oatmeal cookies ($1 shipping and handling not included).

Oh yeah, you could be using free Internet access, or even a free personal computer.

To be sure, businesses always have given away items to try to stoke demand, especially in the early stages of an industry. Like researchers experimenting in a laboratory, companies try different formulas to see which work best to make money and build markets.

''It's a very old model of marketing. It goes back to Gillette giving away razors in order to sell blades," Steidtmann said.

But while give-aways are typical of young, competitive industries, the nature of technology and the Internet has greatly escalated this tactic.

For one, the broad reach of the Internet has vastly eased people's ability to get the freebies. It used to be you had to trek down the bank to get a free toaster. Now you simply click your way to a Web site and wait for the mailman to deliver.

That pervasiveness is spurring businesspeople such as Prentice to try to get bargain-hunters to observe paid advertisements on sites or purchase something else during visits. Some businesses, like the online magazine Slate, tried charging but later changed their minds. After abandoning paid subscriptions in February, the Microsoft-owned Web site says it saw monthly visitors nearly quintuple to 1 million as it brought in more than $2 million in new advertising.

Still other businesses give away software and services to lure visitors to buy a premium version of the freebie.

EFax.com, for instance, offered a free service last February that lets people receive faxes as e-mail attachments, so they can open them up on their computer screens.

But after signing up nearly 1 million people, the company recently started selling a premium version of the service, which lets people do the reverse - send an e-mail attachment as a fax. The cost is $2.95 a month, plus 5 cents for every 30 seconds of faxing. EFax.com vice president of marketing Ron Brown says the company so far has signed up 14,000 paying customers.

The free service ''is an important part of building revenue for our business," Brown said.

There's another reason Web businesses are giving away the store.

In technology, unlike other industries, prices of parts routinely drop. Because computer chips and hard-disk drives cheapen every year, for instance, the cost of giving away the PC is less than ever, making it a cost-effective marketing tool to sell services, such as Internet access. That's why several makers of computers were able to join with providers of Internet service this summer to offer free PCs to people who agree to buy

up to three years of Web access for at least $700.

Conversely, Dell Computer Corp. is offering a year of free Internet access to people who buy its $959 desktop computer (not including a monitor).

Elsewhere on the Web, businesses are willing to trade their products for what they view as an even more valuable currency: personal information about potential customers, from buying habits to addresses, that lets sellers precisely pinpoint potential customers.

Database software running on powerful computers enables companies to easily match the traits of millions of consumers with products they may like - and possibly sell the information to third parties eager for customer data.

Of course, that's a big catch for consumers - the willingness to subject oneself to advertisements. FreePC gives away computers with free online access to select, high-income consumers who agree to fill out lengthy questionnaires covering who they are, their incomes and shopping habits. ZapMe!, a Silicon Valley company, gives schools free computers and Internet access in exchange for the right to display a constant stream of on-screen advertisements.

Other freebies seem more like come-ons.

For example, many trial promotions on the Internet, such as a free week's ''membership" to a pornography site, place the onus on consumers to cancel the order before it turns into a for-fee subscription. To sign up for the offer, the user needs to enter a credit-card number to show he is 18 years or older. But sheer inertia can keep bargain-hunters from actually canceling.

While the ''free era" is arguably good for savvy businesses, it could harm others.

Encyclopaedia Britannica's sales have fallen by more than 50 percent since 1990, after Microsoft began giving away its CD-ROM encyclopedia, Encarta, to personal computer buyers.

Other losers include salespeople, such as investment brokers who have seen their commissions whither as more people join the rush to trade stocks online at discounted prices.

Enjoy the bargains while they last. As Web carrots work their magic - the number of wired U.S. households will nearly double to 67 million in 2003 from 35 million today, predicts Jupiter Communications - businesses will start charging for what used to be free.

The Internet of tomorrow will continue to contain free things, but expect more sites to start charging for the most useful information. For example, an everyday leisure seeker might freely browse for information on skin diving, but an aficionado may have to pay for getting specific information. Some Web sites run by newspapers provide today's news for free, but charge for older articles.

''Once the Internet is more popular, people will know the sites and they won't have as much of a need to give away stuff," says Prentice, the Totallyfreestuff.com owner.

But it may not be a great loss, he adds. ''It's not like you can live off the free items. They just give you a taste of the products you like."

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